

In 2008 WAIMR celebrates 10 years since its inception and the many internationally-important discoveries which have transformed it into WA's premier adult medical research institute.



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Media Statement

WA SCIENTISTS' DISCOVERY TO SHED LIGHT ON IMMUNE SYSTEM DISEASES

The discovery by WA and Scottish scientists of a protein marker of the stem cells which can develop into the "mastermind of the immune system" – the thymus – is set to shed new light on a range of diseases of the immune system.

The Western Australian Institute for Medical Research's (WAIMR) Professor Grant Morahan and Kathy Davern played roles in the breakthrough which is reported in the latest issue of Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of USA.

Few WA scientists have had work published in the prestigious journal.

Professor Morahan, Director of the Centre for Diabetes Research at WAIMR, said this was an important discovery.

"This new marker, Plet-1, will help scientists develop new insights into a number of human diseases, including immunodeficiency, diabetes and cancer," he said.

"The thymus is responsible for the creation of disease-fighting T-cells and finding this marker of stem cells which gives rise to this organ presents enormous possibilities.

"For example, it may help scientists develop ways to help patients whose immune systems are compromised. Also, we found the same marker in the pancreas so it may define stem cells from which we can create new insulin-producing islet cells for diabetes patients."

A key part of this research was the production by WAIMR's Kathy Davern, who heads up the Institute's Monoclonal Antibody Facility, of a special antibody to the new marker.

"Collaborations like this demonstrate the international significance of our cutting-edge Monoclonal Antibody Facility and reveal why WA is becoming a major player in medical research," said Professor Morahan.

"It's also especially pleasing that Australia was involved in this particular work because it was one of our own scientists, Jacques Miller, who discovered the importance of the thymus in the early 1960's."

The research team in Scotland was led by Dr Clare Blackburn, of the Institute for Stem Cell Research in Edinburgh.

The Centre for Diabetes Research is supported by the Diabetes Research Foundation of WA.

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